The Dirty Joke of Cyberpunk or the Humanism of Posthumanism in the Cyberpunk Tradition: Epigenetic Memory and Technology in Gibson's *Neuromancer* and Stephenson's *Snow Crash*

by

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ABSTRACT

What does it mean to be human or for that matter, posthuman, according to a cyberpunk? This paper navigates the experience of being human in the dystopian and highly technologized future worlds found within the cyberpunk literary tradition of the 1980s and early 1990s. This work explores the implication of what it means to be posthuman in these worlds, which are comprised of virtual realities and disembodied identities. This project first addresses posthumanism as a critical theory and its destabilization of the traditional concept of humanism with particular attention to the relationship between the human being and technology. After building a theoretical framework of posthumanism based on works by Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, and Bernard Stiegler, this paper then offers a survey of the cyberpunk tradition and the key themes developed and examined within the genre. The project then investigates two seminal works of the cyberpunk movement, William Gibson's 1984 novel, *Neuromancer*, and Neal Stephenson's 1992 work, *Snow Crash*, in order to trace a becoming posthuman as it is found within cyberpunk. As this paper further explains, the process of uncovering the posthuman within these texts produces a sense of loss and also nostalgia for a previous experience of being human which was already posthuman. The cyberpunk tradition and these novels in particular, reveal that there has always already been a degree of indeterminacy surrounding the question of what it means to be human. Through destabilizing traditionally held conceptions of humanism, cyberpunk and posthumanism offer the potential to rethink ourselves and our comportment towards the world knowing that technology always already informs our experience of being human.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

THE DIRTY JOKE OF CYBERPUNK

"'It's not like I'm using,' Case heard someone say, as he shouldered his way through the crowd around the door of the Chat. 'It's like my body's developed this massive drug deficiency.' It was a Sprawl voice and a Sprawl joke" (Gibson 3). Welcome to the future. At least a future envisioned by William Gibson in his 1984 cyberpunk novel, *Neuromancer*. The Sprawl, also called "BAMA," the "Boston-Atlanta Metropolitan Axis," (43) is a massive, urban development that spans nearly a third of the country and serves as home to an enhanced version of humanity. Here humans supplement themselves with biotech instruments and implants that augment sensory perception so much so that they seemingly allow a release from an embodied experience of reality. Yet Case, the central character of the novel, has lost his ability to experience this disembodied reality after running afoul of his somewhat dubious employers. They exact swift vengeance by injuring his nervous system, which permanently removes his ability to "jack" into cyberspace, effectively eliminating his primary means of survival because he is a cyberspace cowboy – a hacker. To other "cowboys" like him, "The body was meat" (6). The novel begins with Case as a member of this sprawling society, trapped in a "prison of his own flesh" (6). The human body lacks something and only technologies can make it whole, which in this case, are cybernetic implants and synthetic drugs. No doubt the body's inherent deficiency signals the Sprawl joke. The human body is just not quite good enough.

Importantly, Case is not alone in his disdain for the embodied reality that is human flesh. His world is populated with enhanced humans who in one way or another challenge the perception of what it means to be human. In fact, these challenges to the

perception of being human become predominant questions frequently at issue within the genre of cyberpunk fiction itself. Keith Booker offers the following gloss on the genre and its historical setting:

> Cyberpunk not only calls into question what it means to be human, but also suggests that the posthuman is an inevitable consequence of the dissolution of boundaries between human and machine. A challenge to the traditional model of the human subject is mirrored in the typical cyberpunk landscape, a dystopian post-industrial world…dominated by urban sprawl and rife with subcultures from which its outlaw and misfit heroes are drawn. In short, cyberpunk is a fictional attempt to grapple with the realities of our postmodern condition. Initially a response to the technological explosion and postmodern culture of the 1980s, and arguably the most important sf [sic] trend of that era, its influence has spread far beyond the boundaries of science fiction, essentially outliving the cyberpunk movement itself. (110)

Booker rightly recognizes the questions of boundaries, identity, and consciousness which permeate cyberpunk fiction, including *Neuromancer*, yet there remains a question that resides on the outside of his account. He names the posthuman as "an inevitable consequence" that comes from the destabilization of the boundary between human and machine. This suggests, quite reasonably, that science fiction, and in particular, cyberpunk fiction, points to a future where humans and machines, humans and technology, will become intertwined and incorporated together. Yet, as David Seed reminds us, "Whatever we think of SF [Science Fiction], we live science fiction in our daily lives" (1). Science fiction then, is more than a narrative of a future humanity, rather it reveals a present humanity, or perhaps more importantly, humanity as it appears alongside technology. What does being human mean in a technological world? And how do we navigate, or decipher, being human if that must also include technology? That is to

say, as scholars like Bernard Stiegler and others have asked, what if humans are already *post*human? Or further still, what if humans have always already been posthuman?

To provide an answer to such a question assumes, of course, that the posthuman can be identified. It follows then, that if the posthuman can be recognized as such, then the *post* element in posthuman can also be separated from the human element, thereby leaving just the human.

In her work, *Representations of the Post/human: Monsters, Aliens, and Others in Popular Culture*, Elaine Graham suggests, "The erosion of clear boundaries between humans, machines, and non-human nature can either be interpreted as a threat to the 'ontological hygiene' of humanity or a rendering transparent of the very constructed character of the parameters of human nature" (20). Her ideas therefore call into question assumptions around the experience of being human. There is no longer a hygienic, or rather a clean or clear vision of the essence of human nature. Indeed, in order to even begin to reevaluate what being human involves, we must be open to getting a little dirty. No doubt this presents a slightly daunting task, yet Graham's observation implies a way into the human through the posthuman. Thus, cyberpunk fiction, as a "literary movement significant for its rejection of the technological utopianism of much traditional sf" (Booker 110), offers a relatively contemporary entry into the discussion of a "dirty" environment where technology and humans constantly reinscribe one another without offering an absolutely clean or clear distinction. The difference between more traditional science fiction and cyberpunk, as Booker understands it, is that technology, in the latter, reveals humanity's inevitable dependency on machines for survival (120). Daniel Dinello, author of *Technophobia! Science Fiction Visions of Posthuman Technology*, also

extends this viewpoint in his observation that "Most science fiction…projects a pessimistic vision of post-human technology as an autonomous force that strengthens an anti-human, destructive, and repressive social milieu" (17). The intent of the following work, however, is not to argue this pessimism but rather to operate against the anti-human. As I will argue, cyberpunk fiction serves as an entry point into the question of what it means to be human through its focus on the posthuman insofar as this emphasis on *post*, in truth, becomes a trace of the human subject.

Katherine Hayles, in her seminal work, *How We Became Posthuman*, recognizes that "the body is the net result of thousands of years of sedimented evolutionary history, and it is naïve to think that this history does not affect human behaviors at every level of thought and action" (284). Hayles offers up dialectical oppositions revealed in cybernetics, information theory and the influence of the technological on the human body. She rightly points to issues of presence/absence and pattern/randomness as humans have become analogous to computers as processors of disembodied information (2). Hayles' work leads her to locate historically how humans *became* posthuman. Her investigation ultimately leads her to science fiction and cyberpunk and the same binary oppositions that are explored through such texts. She subsequently proposes that the posthuman is as yet still undecided and very much subject to interpretation (291). However, similar to Booker's gloss above, the question of whether or not humans have always already been posthuman predominantly exists on the outside of her argument. Hayles' primary concern is to demonstrate how humans have and are evolving into posthuman figures through the influence of cultural and scientific contexts. While she provides insight on the invention and development of cybernetics and systems theory in a

post-World War II society, what remains significant, I believe, as she notes briefly, is the evolutionary trace of technology. What is not contained, at least explicitly, in the "sedimented evolutionary history" is, according to Stiegler, the always-present influence of technology.

Given the uncertain relationship between technology and humans within cyberpunk fiction, this seems a good place to begin identifying the posthuman. Cyberpunk offers a way into the posthuman by navigating and deciphering the terms of being human. Perhaps then, only through an attempted deconstruction of the posthuman can we arrive at a better understanding of what it means to be human. In these terms, the epigraph of this work suggests that the narrative of *Neuromancer*, as representative of cyberpunk fiction, offers not a joke about the subsuming of the human within the technological, but rather *a dirty joke about the indeterminacy of being human.* Read in this light, the novel becomes a lament for the human subject as an experience of being that cannot ever be fully realized because we are always already posthuman in a world that is granted meaning only through our irreducible posthuman identity.

What exactly is the posthuman and how can it be recognized? These questions will help construct a theoretical foundation with which to then proceed into investigating the role of cyberpunk fiction as a genre dedicated to the narration of the posthuman. In the following work, I will begin first with an examination of the posthuman with particular emphasis on theories advanced by Derrida, Heidegger, and Stiegler, among others. Though short-lived as a movement[1], Fredric Jameson acknowledged cyberpunk as

[1] Booker notes the cyberpunk genre began generally in the early 1980s and evolved into post-cyberpunk by 1992 and Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*. For a more complete historical account of cyberpunk, see his

"the supreme literary expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself" (ix). Cyberpunk then, as an expression of postmodernism, places humans and technology in such contrast with each other that their opposition threatens accepted constructions of human identity and physical embodiment. Yet, as I will attempt to show, the binary oppositions revealed by scholars working with and around the cyberpunk tradition like Katherine Hayles, Larry McCaffery, and Scott Bukatman, are not necessarily oppositions at all. Rather, questions of boundaries, identity, consciousness, and embodiment, as they are couched in a posthuman framework, actually reveal an experience of being that is always already human. In fact, as I will then explicate in a reading of William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, the narrative and language of the text itself has always already been necessarily subject to a posthuman structure. The critical turn, as I will show, comes in the explanation of posthumanism *as a reinscription of the human subject*. The humanism of *Neuromancer*, or that of the entire genre, therefore cannot really be humanism because it must already function as a signifier of posthumanism. There is no humanism without the posthuman.

Following this reading of *Neuromancer*, I will then turn to Stephenson's 1992 publication, *Snow Crash*, described as a "satirical take on the cyberpunk tradition" and an "update of Gibsonian cyberspace" (Booker 117). The point I wish to make here is that even as a satire and a text that is self-aware of the cyberpunk tropes it utilizes, posthumanism as it is found in the novel still functions as a lament over the loss of the human subject. As Hayles claims of this novel, "Stephenson clearly sees the arrival of the posthuman as a disaster" (276). Here the question of arrival describes a becoming in

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book, *The Science Fiction Handbook*. In this text, he states that "cyberpunk was declared dead as early as the publication of the *Mirrorshades* anthology" (114) in 1986.

which humans and technology will remain at odds in the future. However, as I will once more show, this becoming cannot happen as a disaster because it is always already happening.

After my reading of *Snow Crash*, I will conclude by tracing the influence of the posthuman within the cyberpunk tradition and the lament for the human subject as it might be found today in a science fiction world where cyberspace and avatars exist in (virtual) reality. Where is the posthuman now, and how much is owed to the vision of the posthuman in the dirty jokes of cyberpunk? Perhaps such questions will open further lines of inquiry into the humanism of posthumanism.

POSTHUMANISM

So what is posthumanism? The question poses problems on several fronts. In order to understand the post-, do we not first need to ground ourselves in humanism? In the introduction to his work, *Posthumanism*, Neil Badmington effectively establishes such a foundation. He begins by citing Kate Soper's definition that humanism "appeals (positively) to the notion of a core humanity or common essential feature in terms of which human beings can be defined and understood" (2). Importantly, Badmington makes the distinction that in Soper's observation, "humanism is viewed not as progressive but as reactionary" (2). The crucial point is that defining humanism comes as a reaction out of difference. To prove his point, Badmington turns next to Cartesian philosophy and the role of reason in separating humans from animals. He relates that Descartes believes reason is "a universal instrument" (4), but only universal insofar as humans are concerned. The universality does not extend to animals or machines. Descartes seeks to create a clean distinction between humans and other beings, namely animal and machine, and reason as an instrument is the dividing line.

Reason, however, is taken to task, according to Badmington, with the arrival of Marx and Freud who subsequently challenged assumptions associated with human subjectivity (5). The challenges of psychoanalysis and the implications of social power open up consciousness to interpretation and analysis which consequently "demands a rethinking of what it means to be human" (6). Freud's psychoanalysis features the presence of non-rational motivation as it is repressed by the conscious. Such motivation decenters the previously privileged rational subject of humanism. Humans are suddenly found to be motivated by subconscious instincts without the ability to always apply

reason to their animalistic urges. In a further challenge to the essence of humanism, Marx organizes what it means to be human in accordance with materialism and social power rather than based solely on the possession of reason. For Badmington, these two figures expose the fact that being human is no longer defined by the capacity for reason.

Difference itself comes under attack, specifically between humans and machines with the development of computers and the invention of cybernetics in the mid-twentieth century. The implication posed by the arrival of this technology suggests, as Hayles writes, that "humans were to be seen primarily as information-processing entities who are *essentially* similar to intelligent machines" (7). Once more, the definition of the human subject comes under fire and suffers yet another blow. Without reason and difference as clear demarcations of the human, humanism struggles to produce a consistent definition of itself. If computers, as intelligent machines, demonstrate the capacity for reason as such, then the boundary of the humanist subject is again destabilized. The difference between the two entities, human and intelligent machine, is no longer ontologically hygienic. As Bruce Clarke acknowledges, "The idea of the posthuman came of age with the modern coupling of the natural and the technological…" (5). Such a coupling muddied the vision of the humanist subject through the science of cybernetics and information systems. It comes as no surprise then that the questions posed by cyberpunk fiction in the 1980s, namely those of boundaries, identity, and embodiment, appear decades earlier in philosophy and science.

So far we are no closer to defining the posthuman, or for that matter, the human. Perhaps we can turn instead to Jacques Derrida and deconstruction to work out the play between the human and the posthuman. Badmington paraphrases Derrida, "Precisely

because Western philosophy is steeped in humanist assumptions…the end of Man is bound to be written in the language of Man. Each 'transgressive gesture re-encloses us' because every such gesture will have been unconsciously choreographed by humanism. There is no pure outside to which 'we' can leap" (9). While the "trangressive gesture" is that which challenges the accepted view, much like Freud's theories which called into question human consciousness, the very act of the challenge is already subject to the language which establishes the viewpoint in the first place. In other words, the only way to interpret what it means to be human is through human language and dialogue. Crucially however, language itself is an inhuman tool. This means that conception within a human framework (i.e. language) already represents the necessity of a tool, which subsequently implicates the human as already cyborg. Thus the posthuman cannot be thought of outside a framework of human thought, and moreover, the reflexivity of this statement is exactly the point. Returning to Badmington, "Derrida's work permits a rethinking of the anti-humanist position. An approach informed by poststructuralism testifies to an endless opposition from within the traditional account of what it means to be human. Humanism never manages to constitute itself; it forever rewrites itself as posthumanism" (9). How can we conceptualize humanism as a state of being, let alone communicate such an idea, without the use of a tool to do so? As we shall see, humanism forever requires a supplement. Language is required in order to grant meaning and significance. The state of being human, humanism itself, is the experience of being human as it consists of always understanding and observing the world through a process of granting meaning – a process which requires technology, a tool. However, as Badmington rightly argues, this does not mean that humanism does not exist. What

Badmington attempts to point out about Derrida's claim is that maybe the only way into the human is through the posthuman.

In a sense then, Derrida's "dangerous supplement" is already at work in humanism and on humanism. In his famous work *Of Grammatology*, Derrida analyzes Rousseau's privileging of speech over writing. Speech is representative of presence, of being, whereas writing indicates an absence. Yet, writing reinforces presence even as it indicates an absence. Writing therefore, is necessary as a supplement to speech in order to reinforce a presence. But what does this have to do with the posthuman? We must consider for a moment the duality in the nature of a supplement. Jonathan Culler offers this explanation, "The supplement is an inessential extra, added to something complete in itself, but the supplement is added in order to complete, to compensate for a lack in what was supposed to be complete in itself" (103). Both definitions are necessarily true simultaneously. As Arthur Bradley explains, "For Derrida then, the supplement plays two radically different roles: it either confirms an originary presence that is complete in itself…or it reveals an essential lack, or deficiency, of presence that calls for supplementation in the first place" (103). Just as speech requires writing, the presence of the posthuman reveals not just that the human requires a supplement to be human *but that this supplement has always been required*. Recall the epigraph of the Sprawl joke - "It's like my body's developed this massive drug deficiency." We expect to see the word dependency but Gibson chooses "deficiency" in order to present to the reader a world in which the normative requires a supplement to be normative. In other words, Gibson evokes here the human of the posthuman. The deficiency of the body must be supplemented even as it confirms a wholeness.

No doubt it follows that the human and the posthuman are now at an undecidable position, and as Badmington points out, "this movement [between the two states of being] is always happening: humanism cannot escape its 'post-' (9). The word "post" implies potentially two meanings, both of which are viable in the development of working out the question of what it means to be human or posthuman. The first, as I have alluded to previously, is that humanism is always already post, that is to say, after. The humanism of Descartes has to some degree been left behind as reason and difference are challenged. The second meaning of "post" however, is that of a physical position. Read in this way, humanism cannot escape its position. If both readings are true, then humanism is both before and after. Humanism must always take up its post as the precursor to posthumanism, as in coming before. Yet humanism also comes after – it "cannot escape its 'post.'" It must always come after the word 'post.' Humanism can only be defined *after* it is identified. That is, the concept of humanism can only be determined through posthuman terms. This example reinforces that the "pure outside" cannot be accessed. Humanism is always already contained *inside* the posthuman and furthermore, any attempt to access a 'pure' humanism is necessarily mediated by the posthuman because humanism can only become known through a posthuman framework. Posthumanism is humanism is posthumanism.

The question still remains however, what is the posthuman? From here I now want to move away from the grounding of humanism within posthumanism and towards a discussion of being and embodiment. For Cary Wolfe, posthumanism "names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world, the prosthetic coevolution of the human animal with the technicity

of tools and external archival mechanisms (such as language and culture)…" (*What* xv). Here Wolfe introduces technology into the definition of posthumanism. What makes human beings human are not just biological traits, but those things which contribute to being in the world, or Dasein, (borrowing from Heidegger's language) including technology. Indeed, technology functions alongside Hayles' "sedimented evolutionary history" of humanity so much that, as we shall see with Stiegler, becoming human always already involves technology. Wolfe continues, "The question of posthumanism…insists that we attend to the specificity of the human – its ways of being in the world, its ways of knowing, observing and describing – by (paradoxically, for humanism) acknowledging that it is fundamentally a prosthetic creature that has coevolved with various forms of technicity and materiality, forms that are radically 'not-human' and yet have nevertheless made the human what it is" (*What* xxv). This signifies a movement away from revealing the human through difference compared against other beings and instead shifts attention to questions of being and comportment. Perhaps the question is better asked, what makes us human, instead of who is the human over and against the nonhuman?

In his essay, "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger claims, "Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it" (311). Technology, whether we like it or not, informs our being; technology is part of our comportment to the world. He then challenges the notion that technology is defined by its purpose. The accepted view, according to Heidegger, reasons that technology is a "means to an end" (313). Yet, as he argues, there is more to technology than a simple means to an end or result. Technology is also a process. The distinction is of critical importance to Heidegger because the process involves what he

describes as “bringing-forth” or poiēsis (318). He writes, “Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing. If we give heed to this, then another whole realm for the essence of technology will open itself up to us. It is the realm of revealing, i.e., of truth” (318). If humanity is chained to technology and cannot be without it or outside it, then technology, as a revealing, or technē, must reveal being human. The claim is simple enough until Heidegger makes the distinction that technē is the revealing of a thing and not the creation of it. Again, “It is as revealing, and not as manufacturing, that technē is a bringing-forth” (319). However, such revealing is problematic for Heidegger in terms of modern technology because modern technology does not reveal; poiēsis does not occur (320). Contemporary technology, he instead argues, reveals itself in a challenge to the natural world (320). The challenge arises out of an ordering that modern technology places on nature. His primary example of this is a power-plant built on the Rhine River. The existence of the plant alters the essence of the river from just a river to an energy source waiting for humans to require its product. In other words, the technology of the plant has re-ordered the essence of the river into something else. To Heidegger, the re-ordering of the river’s essence is not a revealing of the truth; rather it is a false unconcealment.

Heidegger describes this falseness as “enframing.” “Enframing,” he proposes, “blocks the shining-forth and holding sway of truth. The destining that sends into ordering is consequently the extreme danger. What is dangerous is not technology. Technology is not demonic; but its essence is mysterious. The essence of technology, as a destining of revealing, is the danger” (333). Technology therefore is not a symptom of untruth. What is instead at stake is the danger of destining a false revealing through

ordering. The threat of enframing also applies to humans because we are technological beings. The ordering inherent in enframing presents a potential misstep in determining what it means to be human. Indeed, Heidegger presents a similar warning, “Enframing does not simply endanger man in his relationship to himself and to everything that is. As a destining, it banishes man into the kind of revealing that is an ordering. Where this ordering holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of revealing” (332). If this is true, we then arrive at another potential problem - posthumanism itself could be an enframing of humanism. In this case, posthumanism is then an ordering which consequently limits any other destining. Heidegger, however, presents a possible answer.

Even as technology presents the potential for an enframing of a false destining, enframing also contains what he describes as “the saving power” (337). In the destining ordered by enframing, “the essential unfolding of technology gives man entry into something which, of himself, he can neither invent nor in any way make. For there is no such thing as a man who exists singly and solely on his own” (337). Enframing thus becomes a way of understanding the world, or rather a way of being in the world. Though the dangerous potential exists for a false revealing, enframing is also the “sole way of revealing” and “thus the essential unfolding of technology harbors in itself what we least suspect, the possible rise of the saving power” (337). The saving power therefore originates out of the knowledge that technology is more than just a means, but a revealing and a bringing forth, or poiēsis. Enframing is the conceptualization of the process by which poiēsis can occur. This grants posthumanism, as a conceptualizing of being in the world, the power of poiēsis. Heidegger, however does not extend his argument this far. In fact for him, technology remains exterior to humanity because of its potential for use.

Bernard Stiegler, however, argues differently. For Stiegler, humans and technology have always already been bound together in that technology is an element of being human. Technology, while not part of the human genetic makeup, still exists alongside it, which he describes as epigenetic. As he writes, "this is the paradox of a living being characterized in its forms of life by the nonliving – or by the traces that its life leaves in the nonliving" (Stiegler 50). The nonliving is of course technology, which, according to Stiegler, carries with it its own evolutionary trace. Thus technology appears as the prosthesis which Wolfe acknowledges above. Andrès Vaccari and Belinda Barnet recognize that "Stiegler radicalizes the prosthetic already-there, arguing that it constitutes a break with genetic evolution, and it is this break that constitutes the human" (Vaccari). The evolution of the human necessarily carries with it the prosthetic, or the supplement. In a sense then, we have already arrived at the posthuman. As Stiegler explains, animals have no way of passing along their individual experiences, only their genetic code (*The Ister*). Humans however, through technics, can and do transmit individual experience through the tools they develop. *Humanity inherits, through technology, the memories of the species and as a consequence, culture is visible through technology.* This technological inheritance represents the evolutionary trace of the nonliving which forces the realization that Heidegger's enframing has already happened. Vaccari and Barnet offer the following explanation on Stiegler's theory, "Tools are 'exuded' by the human body in the course of their evolution; they spring, literally, from the nails and teeth of primates, and in turn give us a non-genetic advantage over other species…As a species, we are characterized by our physical and non-mental adaptation. Our memory is transferred to books, our 'strength multiplied in the ox, our fist improved in the hammer'"

(Vaccari). Technology, consequently, creates the human. Being in the world means existing with and through technology. Crucially however, there can be no distinction of the human without technology.

Stiegler frames this undecidability of the "invention of the human" in Derrida's language, writing that "Différance is neither the *who* nor the *what*, but their co-possibility, the movement of their mutual coming-to-be, of their coming into convention. The *who* is nothing without the *what*, and conversely" (Stiegler 141). Now we are beginning to arrive at the posthuman. Derrida's expression 'différance' plays on the word difference and the verb to defer. Stiegler's application of the term indicates that while there is a difference between *who* and the *what*, such difference must always be deferred in order for both to exist as possibility. The posthuman therefore, is the "mutual coming-to-be" between the *who* and the *what*. To Vaccari and Barnet, "Stiegler argues that technics is a structure of inheritance and transmission, a structure that supports progressive accumulation of each successive generation" (Vaccari). Stiegler describes this as "epiphylogenesis," which "bestows its identity upon the human individual: the accents of his speech, the style of his approach, the force of his gesture, the unity of the world" (140). Being in the world then, is more than just a product of genetic evolution, but also the evolution of the non-living – namely, technology and even language. Epiphylogenesis itself is a bringing forth; a revealing of Dasein that acknowledges "epigenetic sedimentation, a memorization of what has come to pass…" (140). There is more at work here than just the body as a record of sedimented genetic history. The memory of technology surpasses the temporal Dasein of an individual and so informs transmission and cultural transmission alongside genetic evolution.

Posthumanism is about the between of the *who* and the *what* and the potentiality of being in the world. In this sense, posthumanism directs us towards a "saving power" and "a destining of revealing" through enframing (Heidegger 335). If humans have always already been posthuman then how do we get outside of the posthuman? Derrida teaches us to ask: how do we talk about such revealing when we are limited by the technology of language and language as a technology?

No doubt this presents a seemingly impossible challenge, but perhaps these questions are best addressed by recalling that the focus is on becoming. Posthumanism, once more, is about the potentiality of being in the world. Heidegger acknowledges that enframing (which cannot be escaped), though it can block a revealing, also permits a "saving power." The poiēsis which occurs in the acknowledgment of the posthuman is an unconcealment of being in the world. In the becoming posthuman we might arrive at the becoming of being human. As Hayles writes, "the posthuman does not really mean the end of humanity, it signals instead the end of a certain conception of the human…" (286). Herein resides the importance of science fiction, and particularly cyberpunk fiction. Through these narratives, questions about boundaries, embodiment, identity and consciousness, force a rethinking of being in the world. Here again is the dirty joke of the Sprawl. Technology in cyberpunk fiction is not a separate entity from humanity; rather technology is intricately bound to the essence of existence; an existence which surely has always already been posthuman. Moreover, this cyberpunk existence reveals an element of sadness and of nostalgia for a humanism which never was. In the cyberpunk world, technology as an epigenetic memory carries only the experiences which survived through generations. Those experiences which did not survive in memory constitute a forgetting,

in other words, lost memories of *what being human used to be like*. Crucially, this threat of forgetting is always extant as technology evolves and carries with it human (or should we say posthuman?) experiences of the present.

THE CYBERPUNK TRADITION

In his work, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction*, Scott Bukatman argues for the appearance of a new identity in the modern technological age, one which signals "an unmistakably doubled articulation in which we find both the end of the subject and a new subjectivity constructed at the computer station or television screen" (9). His study considers texts across contemporary forms of media and genres (1960-1980s), including cyberpunk, in order to explore his idea of "terminal identity fictions," or works which "describe a coupling of both stylistic *and* thematic approaches to the problem of the subject in the electronic era" and whose authors "confront the boundaries of human meaning and value" (9). Bukatman correctly addresses an awareness of changing subjectivity brought about by the role of technology within science fiction and popular culture, yet I believe there is cause to push this line of questioning further. His use of the word terminal implies an ending, a final condition. This suggests that the subject, at least as pursued in these texts, yields to a final state, a telos, which as Bukatman writes, "produce[s] a transcendence which is also always a surrender" (329). Yet as I have previously suggested, what if the experience of transcendence is not the eventual evolution of human into a cybernetic machine, but the realization that humans are always already posthuman? Such a question consequently alters the condition of surrendering to a condition of lamenting for that which has never been possible and that which has been forgotten.

The cyberpunk tradition therefore offers a narrative of this revelation of loss across a variety of leitmotifs, notably that of the body and identity, and significantly, how these themes are housed within technological epigenetic memory. In his preface to

Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology, Bruce Sterling, a preeminent cyberpunk author who contributed greatly to the emergence of the genre, recognizes that "Certain central themes spring up repeatedly in cyberpunk. The theme of body invasion: prosthetic limbs, implanted circuitry, cosmetic surgery, genetic alteration. The even more powerful theme of mind invasion: brain-computer interfaces, artificial intelligence, neurochemistry-techniques radically redefining the nature of humanity, the nature of the self" (xiii). Technology is the catalyst for this redefinition, yet as I argue, this is not so much a redefinition as it is a revealing and a bringing forth. Technology exposes through its own reflexivity that humans have always been posthuman. Cyberpunk, through its contention over the nature of technology in relation to humanity, actually pushes *against* the notion that humans are progressing along a teleological evolution that will ultimately result in the terminal identity of the cyborg. Conversely, cyberpunk exposes an anxiety that becomes a lament for the liberal human subject which itself has never existed *outside the posthuman*.

Sherryl Vint begins to hint at the exposure of anxiety and lamentation in her observation that "Bukatman contends in *Terminal Identity* that cyberpunk is one of the cultural representations that reinstalls human agency at the site of the terminal, the very site where technology intervened in and deconstructed the human subject's edifice of its own autonomy and unity" (*Bodies* 103). Cyberpunk's use of technology to deconstruct the concept of unity between the human body and mind simultaneously destabilizes the assumption that it was ever unified in the first place. Returning to Bukatman's position, "It is the experience of the body that operates to center the subject, which is why the body must serve as the locus for any interface with terminal reality" (243). How does the body

experience “terminal reality?” If the body centers the subject but can only relate the experience through technological means, as a cyber-cowboy experiences the matrix through a console in *Neuromancer*, does this not reinforce the experience itself as a posthuman one? The subject can only relate the experience through language always already informed by the posthuman. Cary Wolfe, working from Derrida, stresses that “our [human] *relation* [sic] to flesh and blood is fatefully constituted by a technicity with which it is prosthetically entwined, a diacritical, semiotic machine of language in the broadest sense that exceeds any and all presence, including our own” (Introduction 30). In other words, how does one grasp the concept of “moving” around in cyberspace without a body, or for that matter describe the environment of cyberspace visually as three dimensional without “natural” language? Language, as a technology itself, is required to give meaning to the experience.

Hayles offers some insight into the question with her observation that “In cyberspace, point of view does not emanate from the character; rather, the pov literally *is* the character. If a pov is annihilated, the character disappears with it, ceasing to exist as a consciousness in and out of cyberspace” (38). If we consider this in terms of the relationship between the individual and technology, point of view therefore *requires* the existence of cyberspace in order to orient itself and declare itself as an entity. Clearly this is an example of Bukatman’s emerging subjectivity in a modern, technological age, but as Vaccari and Barnet point out, “The ‘what’ (technics) invents the ‘who (the human) at the same time that it is invented by it” (Vaccari). The posthuman, as a state of being which has always already arrived, contests Bukatman’s “new” designation. This is not to suggest that his argument is invalid, rather that it exposes the tenuousness of reality as it

is experienced by the human subject. In order to articulate experience at all, the technological is required in whatever form that may take.

Veronica Hollinger, echoing Bruce Sterling, claims "cyberpunk is "posthumanist" science fiction based on the belief that the "technological destruction of the human condition leads not to futureshocked zombies but to hopeful monsters" (206). Her application of "posthumanist" suggests beings that are no longer human but zombies and monsters. I would argue that such a claim does not give cyberpunk enough credit. Posthumanism does not have to be teleological insofar as offering a destined end of humanism. Recall Heidegger and the role of technē as a mode of revealing. What is revealed is both a becoming posthuman and a lament for the unbecoming human. Posthumanism is a mourning of humanism because the experience of the posthuman is always already that of the human.

Although he is not explicitly defining the posthuman within cyberpunk, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. insightfully stresses the importance of the experience that is common to the genre. He writes:

> In a [cyberpunk] universe where the forces of innovation are constantly tinkering with human beings' own information processing systems through telematics, drugs, and surgical intervention, the regulator of experience (ego? self? spirit?) can no longer accept any experience as worth more than any other. The only standard is thrill, the ability to 'light up the circuits' of the nervous matrix, sensation so strong that it can draw consciousness into the conditions of its own possibility. (191)

I would agree, as Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. seems to suggest, that in the cyberpunk tradition, technology tempers experience. Sensation as the product of thrill requires an externalized supplement as a catalyst and the resulting experience must be moderated by this very supplement. This experience consequently reveals a bringing forth of the *post*human.

Consciousness finds itself free from a physical grounding in a "meat" body. The problem of course, which the experience of the thrill through technology reiterates, is that there is no getting outside the influence of technē. Cyberpunk reinforces the necessity of a rethinking of humanism. As we shall see with *Neuromancer*, the novel demonstrates a preoccupation with the experience of physical sensation even as the characters move in and out of "virtual" reality and the matrix of cyberspace. Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. describes this emphasis within the genre as "neuroromanticism," – a romanticism that "is helpless and sad, against the powers of exteriorized mind…The flesh is sad, and then some – romance is a case of nerves" (193). Why is the flesh sad? Perhaps because such experiences reveal the human to have always already been posthuman.

Or perhaps there is sadness in the realization that the dirty joke of the Sprawl contains the inescapable truth that the body does not hold preeminence in the construction of identity, or maybe more importantly, that the body requires a supplement to find expression. This realization returns us to Stiegler's position where he understands that "Humanity is without qualities, without predestination: it must invent, realize, produce qualities, and nothing indicates that, once produced these qualities will bring about humanity, that they will become *its* qualities; for they may rather become those of technics" (194). Once again, technology operates outside the body and outside the genetic inheritance of humanity. What this suggests is that the idea of humanism is itself a construction owing to its relationship with technē.

The cyberpunk tradition, in its fixation on the experience of the posthuman, is also simultaneously a reinforcement of what it means to be human, although it does not recognize it as humanism. Undoubtedly, the posthumanism which cyberpunk attempts to

exemplify is different from the humanism which it laments. The difference, or rather the différance, between the two results in the latent anxiety within the genre and exposes my primary claim: cyberpunk posthumanism is a reinscription of humanism because there is no getting outside the posthuman. Experience must always be contextualized and conceptualized within the human. Cyberpunk, even though it navigates being in the world as a posthuman experience, every experience is still the experience of the human. Moreover, here is the cause for sadness and lament in a cyberpunk world. There is no pure humanism in which to retreat, "It's like [the human] body's developed this massive drug deficiency" (Gibson 3). The idea of the human as it is lamented within cyberpunk fiction does not exist. Rather, the humanism embodied by cyberpunk texts is always already posthuman, which itself evokes the only possibility of the human.

In attempting to trace these lines of différance, no doubt there is always the threat of falling into the trap of reflexivity. If the human has always been posthuman, and posthumanism is the only way to describe humanism, then how do we navigate out of this apparent aporia? Larry McCaffery, in his book, *Storming the Reality Studio*, proposes that "postmodern SF [inclusive of cyberpunk] should be seen as the breakthrough 'realism' of our time…It seeks to empower us by providing a cognitive mapping that can help situate us in a brave new postmodern world that systematically distorts our sense of who or where we are, of what is 'real' at all, of what is most valuable about human life" (16). Here again is the importance of becoming. The posthuman of cyberpunk provides the enframing that Heidegger suggests is a "destining of revealing."

There are two levels of enframing at work here. First, as I have discussed previously, there is the enframing produced by technology. Technology, as it is presented

in cyberpunk, allows for a bringing forth of a (post)human subject as a being always already moderated by technē within the text. The second enframing exists on a meta-narrative level. The posthumanism of cyberpunk fiction reveals that the language of the narrative itself can be considered technē. The language of the cyberpunk narrative becomes a tool which brings forth the idea that there can be no escape, no getting outside of a language that is always already posthumanist. In other words, the act of writing itself supplements the experience of being human. Cyberpunk fiction allows then, a unique perspective in that its characters are distinctly categorized as posthuman. The reader therefore experiences the disembodied sensations of a "cyberspace cowboy" yet can only conceptualize them through a very human context. As Hayles points out about nature of pov in cyberspace, there is a similar experience in the description of the cyberspace environment. There must be signifiers that grant meaning to the reader, and therefore these signifiers must be able to be conceived in terms of human understanding. This experience of reading produces a posthuman figure, the "cyberspace cowboy," but also one couched in "humanist" terms.

In her influential text, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Donna Haraway makes the claim that "No objects, spaces, or bodies are sacred in themselves; any component can be interfaced with any other if the proper standard, the proper code, can be constructed for processing signals in a common language" (163). Though she is primarily discussing the figure of the cyborg as a being constructed out of a multitude of ideologies (often contradictory) and our social responsibility to realize the effects of such a construction, her point here applies to cyberpunk posthumanism as well. The word cyberpunk itself is a cyborg – an amalgamation of the words cyber and punk. Together the two words represent a code "for

processing signals in a common language," as Haraway suggests. As Sabine Heuser notes, "The construction of some variant of cyberspace – also called the matrix, the grid, the system, or the Metaverse – describes the 'cyber' aspect of cyberpunk" (5). The "punk" she writes, "negates what has gone before, while it strives to make art and to find new forms of expression that break with convention. The punk attitude aims at re-inventing the meaning of art, so that art can continue to exist" (30). There is already a framework in place then, through the identifier cyberpunk, and one that strongly suggests a bringing forth, in Heidegger's view, of an essence. Perhaps it is not surprising that Heidegger closes his essay on technology by claiming that "The poiēsis of the fine arts was also called technē" (339). For Heidegger, art also carries with it the possibility of a revealing and a bringing forth. Cyberpunk presents a similar, and even literal, joining together of its components. Thus we can avoid the aporia that presents itself in posthumanist humanism through shifting our attention towards what is unconcealed.

Through the cyberpunk tradition, we can begin to consider the essence of what is unconcealed. Returning once more to Hayles' account of the posthuman, she observes "the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born" (3). Cyberpunk then, represents the unconcealing of this process that places the origin of the human firmly within the posthuman.

The body is, and always will be, a prosthetic tool that must be guided. Timothy Leary writes,

> *Cyberpunk* is, admittedly, a risky term. Like all linguistic innovations, it must be used with a tolerant sense of high-tech humor. It's a stop gap, transitional meaning-grenade thrown over the language barricade to describe the resourceful, skillful individual who accesses and steers knowledge/communication technology towards his/her own private goals. For personal pleasure, profit, principle, or growth. (252)

The word "cyber," as he explains, means "pilot" in Greek. Consequently (and fittingly) cyberpunk navigates the manipulation of the prosthetic body by the conscious self and the boundaries between "virtual" reality and reality. Yet such navigation, as we shall see with *Neuromancer* and *Snow Crash*, is far from easy. Only through the process of navigation do we arrive at the sadness I alluded to previously. The teleological course of humanity is not set but its navigational system remains most assuredly posthuman. The unconcealing of the posthuman figure creates the anxiety and ultimately the lament for a humanism that can never be. Leary is correct when he points out the need for "high-tech humor." Cyberpunk language reveals again the same Sprawl joke about deficiency. The body is deficient and so is language. The question of identity and what it means to be human, originates only through this process of navigation, which itself is a construction of experiences through prostheses.

I wish to return now to Bukatman's notion of terminal identity. In his chapter titled "Terminal Flesh," he claims, "The body must become a cyborg to retain its presence in the world, resituated in technological space and refigured in technological terms. Whether this represents a continuation, a sacrifice, a transcendence, or a surrender of 'the subject' is not certain" (247). Perhaps cyberpunk requires us to navigate all of these possibilities, but I believe the primary unconcealment arises from continuation. As Bruce Sterling proudly announces, "Cyberpunk has little patience with borders" (xiv).

The world of the cyberpunk is the world of the posthuman. Yet it is not so simple as this. There is a sense of palpable anxiety as boundaries are transgressed and identity itself is revealed to be disconnected from the body and the physical self. Questions are raised about the possibility of the end of humanity as it is replaced by technology. The future points towards an eventual becoming cyborg. However, in thinking about the future, there is also a rethinking of the present. Here is the poiēsis of cyberpunk – its "saving power." We have always already been posthuman. Experience and subjectivity have always been moderated by technē. Thus being in the world is being posthuman. It follows therefore, that humanism represents a denial of the necessary supplement, or that which already makes us posthuman. Cyberpunk laments the realization that there can never be a return to humanism because there was never a point of origin or departure. There has always been a lack and thus always a need for the supplement and the cyberpunk tradition serves as a reminder that deficiency has always been a reiterating dirty joke.

WILLIAM GIBSON'S *NEUROMANCER*

As I noted briefly in the introduction, William Gibson's 1984 novel *Neuromancer* is the story of Henry Dorsett Case, an ex-hacker, or in the terms of the narrative, an ex-cyberspace cowboy. Case struggles for survival as a small-time fence because his nervous system has been damaged by his previous employers after he crossed them. This neurological damage destroyed his ability, as a cyberspace cowboy, to hack the virtual defenses of governments and corporations within the matrix. As the novel begins however, Case is hired by a man named Armitage to hack into the artificial intelligence system of one of the most powerful corporations in the world, and in return, Armitage pays to have Case's nervous system repaired and so restore his hacker identity. Armitage also hires Molly, a cyborg "street samurai" (Gibson 30) as the physical counterpart to Case's disembodied presence in the matrix. She must physically break into the home of the corporation's owners while Case hacks in virtually. Eventually Case and Molly learn that Armitage is being controlled by the same artificial intelligence that he is supposed to hack. This AI, known as Wintermute, is an essentially sentient and disembodied being who seeks to remove itself from the bonds of the corporation that created it. *Neuromancer* therefore calls into question basic conceptions and assumptions of being human as the divisions between technology and humanity are no longer distinct, and in fact, have never been distinct.

Gibson opens *Neuromancer* with the Sprawl joke about the deficiency of the human body and shortly after follows with a description of Case and his desolation. The novel immediately establishes through Case this sense of lacking which only reinforces his deficiency. In his prime, Case "operated on an almost permanent adrenaline high, a

byproduct of youth and proficiency, jacked into a custom cyberspace deck that projected his disembodied consciousness into the consensual hallucination that was the matrix" (5). However, after the vengeance enacted upon his nervous system by his employers for his betrayal, Case is now less than whole. Indeed, "For Case, who'd lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall…The body was meat…[a] prison of his own flesh" (6). His disembodied self, now fallen from a unified wholeness, finds itself suddenly in an embodied state. The question becomes, as it appears throughout the entirety of the novel, which experience is more human?

Thomas Foster, in his book, *The Souls of Cyberfolk: Posthumanism as Vernacular Theory*, points out a general criticism of cyberpunk fiction that in its tendency to establish a "dichotomy between overembodiment and (a desire for disembodiment)," it is "unable to think its way out of Cartesian mind/body dualisms" (50). Foster, however, navigates within this apparent undecidability and proposes that cyberpunk allows for the development of a new "language" of posthumanism as it might be applied to diverse political identities (xxi, 50). While his argument in regards to political identity extends well beyond my focus here, I agree that *Neuromancer* does not necessarily privilege a disembodied experience of the human over an embodied one. In fact, as the first description of Case reveals, the novel acknowledges and even emphasizes the requirement of the Derridean supplement as necessary to human experience. Moreover, the necessity of the supplement uncovers that the human experience is always already a posthuman one and that this revelation is cause for lament.

Importantly, the novel does not begin with Case discovering a newfound ability or mastering a new technology like so many other science fiction heroes (for example, Luke

Skywalker or Tony Stark as Iron Man). Case is quite the opposite as he begins the novel without his unique abilities as a "cyberspace cowboy." His original, posthuman self has already been lost. The allusion to the biblical fall of man suggests that Case has lost his singular, unified self *which was already posthuman*. Imprisoned within his body, he is without the supplement which defines his comportment in the world. The basic human state, therefore, is an unnatural one. This seemingly establishes the undecidability between the mind/body dualism that Foster comments on, but just as he pushes against this aporia, so will I.

This leads to my earlier discussion of posthuman theory and the notion of Dasein. Being human, especially in the narrative of *Neuromancer*, is more than just the dichotomy between mind and body; rather it is the experience of temporality, of actual *being* in the world. For Case (and in fact, all of the characters in the novel), technology informs his comportment to the world. Without the ability to connect to the matrix, he must eke out a living as a common street hustler. Yet Case still experiences this physical reality as he would in the virtual reality of the matrix. When he realizes he is being followed early in the novel,

> He [feels] a stab of elation, the octagons and adrenaline mingling with something else…Because, in some weird and very approximate way, it is like a run in the matrix. Get just wasted enough, find yourself in some desperate but strangely arbitrary kind of trouble, and it was possible to see Ninsei as a field of data, the way the matrix had once reminded him of proteins linking to distinguish cell specialties. (Gibson 16)

Case's experience is moderated, or rather enframed through a posthuman self. He responds to his feelings of elation and desperation, which are arguably primal, even instinctual experiences, by describing them through technological references of *virtual*

reality. His environment can be broken down into a field of data, or simply an array of information. In other words, the language Case uses to relate to the physical feelings experienced by his body and his mind are best understood through his relationship with technology. Case's language reiterates the fact that language itself is a form of technology and it is only through technology that Case experiences being human, or rather being *post*human.

Case's experience therefore offers a revealing: a bringing forth through technē. As Dani Cavallaro recognizes of Gibson's cyberspace:

> The human body immersed in a virtual environment is made harder and shinier by its fusion with technology. Yet it also crosses over into the domain of the hybrid, for its humanity is indissolubly linked to non-human apparatuses. The responses elicited by such an interpenetration of the organic and the inorganic are ambivalent; on the one hand…technology is viewed as a kind of magic mirror…reflecting humanity in an idealized form; on the other technology is associated with the engulfment of the human by the non-human. (28)

Cavallaro proposes yet another dualism at work within cyberpunk that offers an either/or scenario. Once more, I want to push against this dualistic tendency and propose instead that *Neuromancer* offers a more complex insight into the experience of Dasein. Case is not engulfed by technology, nor does technology offer a strictly teleological vision of enhanced humans. Instead, Cavallaro is on the right track with the "indissoluble link" between humans and non-human apparatuses. This link is itself technē as an epigenetic memory. What is unconcealed is the necessity of the link, and in some fashion, also the lament for a human experience that never was.

While many critics have focused primarily on the experience of disembodiment and cyberspace reality within the novel, there also exists within *Neuromancer* an

underlying preoccupation with the physicality of the human body, in particular the importance of hands. Hands represent Cavallaro's "link" that mediates between the human and the nonhuman. Case's associate and sometimes lover, Molly, a "girl with a gymnast's body and conjurer's hands" (31) is a surgically enhanced human assassin implanted with permanent reflective glasses over her eye sockets as well as retractable blades inserted beneath her finger nails. As they walk together through the crowded streets, Case and Molly watch a holographic projection of a knife fight between two men. Though the fight is physically occurring in an arena below them, they can only see the holographic projections of the fighters, which again emphasizes an experience that is mediated through the link of technology. Case watches and recalls, "The knife-fighter's grip is the fencer's grip…the fingers curled, thumb aligned with blade. The knives seemed to move of their own accord, gliding with a ritual lack of urgency through the arcs and passes of their dance, point passing point…" (Gibson 37). He is preoccupied by the fight and forgets the yakitori in his hands while the "Thick brown sauce trickled down the skewers and over his knuckles" (37). As he watches, he is overcome by a panic attack and tries to flee. He is tripped during his flight and attacked by a boy with a knife. Molly saves him by gunning the boy down and then nonchalantly offers Case a "blood-flecked bag of preserved ginger" (39). Case notices during the exchange that "her hands were sticky with blood" (39). Hands grasp tools, weapons, food, and not least of all, manipulate the physical apparatus, or 'deck' of the cyberspace cowboy. Thus we arrive at the posthuman as the temporal experience of being in the world mediated *by and through technology as an epigenetic memory*. Technology in *Neuromancer* therefore becomes a

necessary supplement by which Case and the rest of humanity encounter and conceptualize the world.

The presence of this supplement comes to be represented in yet another hand tool, a shuriken. Case admits to himself early in the novel that "shuriken had always fascinated him, steel stars with knife-sharp points…the chrome stars held his gaze. They caught the street's neon and twisted it, and it came to [him] that these were the stars under which he voyaged, his destiny spelled out in a constellation of cheap chrome" (11-12). Eventually Molly gives Case a shuriken as a gift and he keeps it with him, often feeling its presence against his body through his clothes. The novel ends with Case throwing the shuriken into an electronic wall screen which temporarily comes alive with "random patterns flickering feebly from side to side, as though it were trying to rid itself of something that caused it pain" (270). After this, Case says simply, "I don't need you" (270). Exactly who he is referring to remains ambiguous. Prior to its destruction, the screen was the technological medium by which the AI Wintermute (who eventually transforms into the matrix itself) communicates with Case. Or the reference could be Molly, as he willingly throws away the gift of the shuriken. Either way, it is significant that the action of renouncement comes in the discarding of this tool, this weapon. Case's sadness is mediated by a tool, or perhaps it is more appropriate to say that this tool is required as a supplement in order for him to express his grief and his anxiety. This event summarizes Case's experience of being in the world. He is a cyberspace cowboy and appropriate to the "cyber" part of his identity, he must participate in the act of navigation, that is to say, he must read and decipher his environment. The act of deciphering produces anxiety and grief for a human experience that never was. Case has always already been posthuman.

He cannot get outside or beyond the posthuman because his experiences have always been mediated by the posthuman itself.

The inability to get beyond the posthuman holds true even in the most intimate "human" moments. The first sexual encounter between Case and Molly is also described in relation to the matrix. "She rode him…impaling herself, slipping down on him again and again, until they both had come, his orgasm flaring blue in a timeless space, a vastness like the matrix, where the faces where shredded and blown away down hurricane doors…" (33). The physical experience of orgasm is understood through the metaphor of the matrix which itself is a data array and therefore only holds meaning *after* it has been deciphered. William Haney observes of *Neuromancer*,

> Throughout the novel the traditional notions of character come under scrutiny, with the either/or status of human/machine identity pushing against the boundaries of neither/both. Some characters, especially Case, have bimodal identities: a socially constructed aspect determined by their merger with technology; and a potentially unconstructed aspect induced by the effect of cyberspace on consciousness. (94)

I would argue however, that there are no bimodal identities in the novel. Yes, Case's identity is constructed, but it has always already been constructed because human identity *requires* a technological supplement to comport itself in the world, whether that be through language as a tool or another implement. *Neuromancer* is labeled as science fiction. It details a future existence and the anxiety of humanity's place in the world alongside artificial intelligence, but it also reveals that humanism is a construction by and through a technological supplement which defines posthumanism.

After Armitage pays for Case's nervous system to be surgically repaired so that he can once again jack into the matrix, his first connection affects him entirely – mentally, physically, and emotionally.

> In the bloodlit dark behind his eyes, silver phosphenes boiling in from the edge of space, hypnagogic images jerking past like film compiled from random frames. Symbols, figures, faces, a blurred, fragmented mandala of visual information… A gray disk… flowered for him…the unfolding of his distanceless home…And somewhere he was laughing, in a white-painted loft, distant fingers caressing the deck, tears of release streaking his face. (Gibson 52)

Case is reunited with the necessary supplement and consequently experiences his reunified self. His identity certainly does not seem bimodal. Case's experience in cyberspace significantly affects all aspects of his being. There is not a differentiation between his experience of virtual reality and physical reality insofar as both influence and shape his overarching human experience of Dasein. This suggests of course that being in the world means being posthuman, which is also always already *the irreducible experience of being human.*

Neuromancer plays this out to the extreme through Case's use of a "simstim deck," which he describes as "a gratuitous multiplication of flesh input" (55). Essentially this deck allows him to jack into Molly's physical body as if he were jacking into the matrix. Through "simstim," Case can now see through Molly's technologically enhanced vision, smell fragrances and aromas as she walks through a public market, and feel the movement of her body. He is "the passenger behind her eyes" (56). He is in effect, experiencing her reality as it exists through her physical body. As Hollinger says of posthumanism in *Neuromancer*, as it is "produced by the interface of the human and the machine, [it] radically decenters the human body, the sacred icon of the essential self, in

the same way that the virtual reality of cyberspace works to decenter conventional humanist notions of an unproblematical 'real'" (207). Here again is the dirty joke of the Sprawl. There is no singular hygienic experience of being human. Case, disembodied from his own physical being, still experiences the "real" that is Molly's being in the world. This is further complicated in that the sensation of pain that Molly experiences, such as a broken leg, is also felt in Case's leg, albeit just briefly. Again, despite the novel's apparent anxiety over the potentiality of humanity reaching a disembodied state of being, there remains the constant reminder of the presence of a physical body. Crucially however, the experience of the physical body is still mediated by the supplement, by technology. Case, as Molly's "passenger," decenters his identity from his own body, yet he does not cease to exist as himself. His reality as it exists in the environment of cyberspace, or as it exists through the "simstim" and Molly's body, still *defines his being in the world*. The body, itself a tool, is a prosthetic, an implement by which to comprehend and navigate through the reality of the world.

Graham furthers this claim as she writes, "Human subjectivity cannot be equated with a single privileged aspect, such as mental functioning. Rather, the mind and the self are themselves intertwined with physical and proprioceptive transactions. The subject is always an organic-technological body-in-relation, both creative agent and created subject within its changing environment" (198). Her statement echoes Heidegger's notion of Dasein and reinforces the significance of comportment in the world. Case's reality, his experience, is always already as "an organic-technological body-in-relation." The same is true for Molly, who continuously defends her actions and behavior by simply saying, "I guess it's just the way I'm wired" (Gibson 25). On the outside her explanation is perhaps

less than satisfying, yet there is an inherent element of poiēsis in her simple declaration. Her "wiring" includes all of the technology she employs to navigate and assign meaning within her environment. Her statement reveals that she, like Case, and indeed humanity in general, has always been posthuman. There is also an implied sadness in that she says at first, "I guess it's just…" She cannot adequately conceptualize why she is the way she is. Moreover, she cannot ever know this, because there is no getting outside a posthuman framework. She is subject to the technology that mediates her comportment to the world so any attempt to describe her essential nature, her essential being, must always be through a posthuman construction.

The narrative continues to play with this posthuman structure through the figures of McCoy "The Dixie Flatine" Pauley, and Armitage. Pauley is a deceased cyberspace cowboy who was once a friend of Case's yet has been reconstructed as ROM (Read-Only Memory) so only his memory remains. He/it exists as a construct, a disembodied figure permanently limited to the virtual environment of the matrix. Case asks, "Are you sentient, or not?" to which Dixie replies, "Well, it *feels* like I am, kid, but I'm really just a bunch of ROM. It's one of them, ah, philosophical questions, I guess…" (131). Case admits too that "It was disturbing to think of the Flatline as a construct, a hardwired ROM cassette replicating a dead man's skills, obsessions, knee-jerk responses…" (77). Regardless, however, of Pauley's existence as a construct, he still experiences *being in the world*, albeit a virtual one. The presence of his disembodied self again stresses the required supplement of technology in order to express Dasein. Armitage, unlike Pauley in that he is a living, physically-embodied human, is also a construct built "up from scratch" (202), by the artificial intelligence, Wintermute, who created him from the shattered

psyche of a man once known as General Corto. The presence of both figures reiterates the question of what does it mean to be human? No clear, hygienic answer reveals itself because there is no exterior to the posthuman. Pauley and Armitage are literal constructs who only exist by and through their comportment with their environments. Thus, being in the world requires technology which subsequently becomes technē.

What is ultimately revealed is that being in the world requires a necessary supplement. The world of *Neuromancer* demonstrates that posthumanism is already *the irreducible experience of being human.* Technology is that which mediates being in the world. Returning to Wolfe's interpretation of the posthuman, "the human…is fundamentally a prosthetic creature that has coevolved with various forms of technicity and materiality, forms that are radically "not-human" and yet have nevertheless made the human what it is" (*What* xxv). Case's reality, just as it is for Molly, the Pauley construct, and Armitage, is based on individual comportment towards the environment and the only way to experience reality is through prosthetics, through technology. Importantly, such prosthetics have always already existed. No doubt this is a cause for lament. Technology, however, as a necessary navigational tool, and certainly appropriate for a cyberspace cowboy, allows for the possibility that the dirty joke of the Sprawl need not indicate a preordained end of humanity, merely that being human is always already the experience, and memory of, being posthuman.

NEAL STEPHENSON'S *SNOW CRASH*

Some critics have described Neal Stephenson's 1992 publication of *Snow Crash* as a signal of the end of the cyberpunk era and a novel which to some degree abandons the urgency and anxiety over humans losing their bodies or the realities of becoming cyborg (Booker 117). Instead, as Booker admits, 'postcyberpunk' novels like *Snow Crash* are noted to "often employ a humorous tone and display a sense of optimism about the future" (117). *Snow Crash*, he writes, "is a satirical take on the cyberpunk tradition" (117). While Stephenson's novel certainly satirizes tropes associated with cyberpunk fiction, it still maintains an underlying lament for a humanism that can never be realized outside the posthuman. Recall Hayles' statement that with this novel, "Stephenson clearly sees the arrival of the posthuman as a disaster" (276). Stephenson describes a world in which humans are analogous to computers insofar as they are receptors for data which is then processed into information, and hence also susceptible to viral infection. The titular Snow Crash is a virus which infects the minds of humans as they exist physically in reality or through their avatars in virtual reality. Hayles suggests that "Stephenson reasons that there must exist in humans a basic programming level, comparable to machine code in computers, at which free will and autonomy are no more in play than they are for core memory running a program" (272). The Snow Crash virus hacks the "deep structures" of the brain, reducing its host to a lessened state of consciousness, essentially creating a mindless creature capable of following only the instruction of those in control of the virus itself.

Importantly, the novel explains that a form of this metavirus has functioned since the earliest days of humans through religion, beginning, in particular, with ancient Sumer.

As Stephenson's main character, Hiro Protagonist, learns, the priests of ancient Sumer controlled the virus and therefore ruled over civilization. However, with the introduction of a 'nam-shub,' itself a tool by the god Enki, which served as an antidote, the masses developed immunity to the virus of the priests. The "nam-shub of Enki" therefore marks the "beginnings of human consciousness- when we had to think for ourselves" (Stephenson 398). Hiro further details that this original virus spread verbally, through a common language, what he describes as "the mother tongue" or " a vestige of an earlier phase of social development" (395). Enki's antidote, in order to break the control of this singular language, disrupted the system and produced a Babel effect. This 'Fall,' as it were, removed the power of the virus by generating new languages and indeed, creating consciousness itself. Hiro's quest, with the aid of his punk and hacker colleagues, is to prevent L. Bob Rife, a telecommunications mogul and cult leader, from reintroducing this virus by accessing the "deep structures" present in the human mind and gaining control over millions of people. Becoming cyborg, or becoming posthuman, in the world of *Snow Crash* is not a threatening disaster because it has already happened and continues to happen. Rife's plan of world domination is viable because he has discovered the technicity of language. Rife realizes that that the ancient Sumerians utilized language itself as a tool to maintain control and that he can now do the same within contemporary society. He understands that language is the necessary supplement which mediates the experience of the body. Control of such a tool therefore means control over how humans comprehend being human, and consequently how they comport themselves within the world. Further still, the novel suggests that *technology constitutes being human insofar as technology creates cultural memory.*

Kelly Wisecup offers the view that "Snow Crash's ability to define what is human within the novel positions the virus as a primary force of history; it is responsible for both culture and extinction. Because Snow Crash is an engineered virus capable of affecting its hosts' behavior by infecting their minds, it does not merely reveal the cultural development (or lack thereof) of its hosts, it actually functions as culture" (857). The virus therefore echoes Stiegler's notion of technics as an epigenetic structure which contributes to the evolution of humanity. The virus works because humans are innately susceptible to 'programming.' Hiro explains, "We've got two kinds of languages in our heads. The kind we're using now is acquired. It patterns our brains as we're learning it. But there's also a tongue that's based in the deep structures of the brain, that everyone shares. These structures consist of basic neural circuits that have to exist in order to allow our brains to acquire higher languages" (Stephenson 395). Humans physically process information through neural circuits and then in order to describe this process, rely on the technology of language to present the metaphor that humans are 'like' computers. The experience of being human is the same dirty joke that *Neuromancer* demonstrates. There is something lacking, and only through the epigenetic inheritance of technology does the experience of being human reveal itself. As Stiegler argues, "Epiphylogenesis bestows its identity upon the human individual: the accents of his speech, the style of his approach, the force of his gesture, the unity of his world" (140). Thus, we arrive at the characters of *Snow Crash*, particularly the figure of Hiro Protagonist. His experience of being is determined by not only his genetic inheritance but also his technological epigenetic heritage. His business card reads, "Hiro Protagonist/ Last of the freelance hackers/ Greatest sword fighter in the world/ Stringer, Central Intelligence Corporation/

Specializing in software-related intel/ (music, movies & microcode)" (17). Here is the Dasein of Hiro Protagonist on a handy business card. Like Case, Hiro is defined by his relationship with technology; or rather technology constitutes his comportment in the world. The world of *Snow Crash* therefore offers a vision of technology evolving at a faster rate than humanity. Importantly, Hiro cannot be fully aware of the evolution of the nonliving because his existence is temporal. Being in the world is his experience as he comprehends it in the present, not as a product of technological evolution. The result of his existence as such generates a vague sense of nostalgia through the satire of the novel for what the experience of being human used to be like. Of course, this past as it is perceived was never human either, but rather always already posthuman.

Nostalgia for the past appears most prominently in the novel in relationship to the Metaverse, Stephenson's imagining of cyberspace, similar to Gibson's matrix. Hiro recollects a simpler time when his virtual neighborhood in the Metaverse "was just a little patchwork of light amid a vast blackness. Back then, the Street was just a necklace of streetlights around a black ball in space" (25). Now though, "the Street is always garish and brilliant, like Las Vegas freed from constraints of physics and finance" (26). Further still, in those early days of the Metaverse before mass virtual transit, "When Hiro first saw this place, ten years ago, the monorail hadn't been written yet; he and his buddies had to write car and motorcycle software in order to get around. They would take their software out and race it in the black desert of the electronic night" (27). His lament suggests that the experiences he remembers with fondness have always been those of the posthuman. These are memories of virtual experiences, yet Hiro clearly remembers them as they happened, despite not happening in 'reality.' To his memory, no difference exists

between a virtual experience or an experience in reality. The question becomes, if this is what is remembered, what has been forgotten? Memory, as a function of technological epigenetics, therefore contains no trace of humanism as such. Recall the passage quoted from Vaccari and Barnet earlier, "Tools are 'exuded' by the human body in the course of their evolution…As a species, we are characterized by our physical and non-mental adaptation. Our memory is transferred to books, our 'strength multiplied in the ox, our fist improved in the hammer'" (17). Again, this means technology always already creates the human. What is recollected and lamented is always the experience of being posthuman. Being posthuman is what it means to be human, as Hiro's experience reveals.

Bukatman also recognizes the significance of the virtual experience on the Street as it relates to community (193). He writes, "Stephenson is adept at envisioning a data space as a site of *social* interaction and interactivity, and his conception of the human in the electronic realm is memorable" (193). The virtual representations of individuals, known as avatars, appear according to the desires of their owners. The Street of the Metaverse is easily navigated and its inhabitants familiar, despite avatars such as "a gorilla or a dragon or a giant talking penis" (Stephenson 36). As the narrator points out, "Spend five minutes walking down the Street and you see all of these" (36). The frequent appearance of such comic avatars suggests their normalcy in this (virtual) reality. Indeed, despite their appearance, avatars follow a certain logic within the Metaverse. The narrator warns the reader, "You can't just materialize anywhere in the Metaverse, like Captain Kirk beaming down from on high. This would be confusing and irritating to the people around you. It would break the metaphor. Materializing out of nowhere (or vanishing back into Reality) is considered to be a private function best done in the confine of your

own House" (36). Stephenson's Metaverse is clearly not Gibson's matrix. Maintaining the metaphor, or rather the simulation of reality is vital to life in the Metaverse, whereas navigation in the matrix is not represented through a metaphor based on reality. *Neuromancer* offers an image of a world in which the demarcation between physical reality and disembodied experience is both visible and highly distressed. *Snow Crash*, however, describes a world comfortable with life in cyberspace and life as inherently technological. Being in the world for Hiro and company is not recognized as a technologically mediated experience because it is always already the norm. Again, this suggests the technological epigenetic heritage present in the world of the novel. Yet also present through the satire of the novel is a lament for a simpler past *which was always already posthuman*.

The narrator again offers Hiro's nostalgia for his youth "When Hiro learned how to [program], way back fifteen years ago, a hacker could sit down and write an entire piece of software by himself. Now, that's no longer possible. Software comes out of factories, and hackers are, to a greater or lesser extent, assembly-line workers" (39). Hiro does not acknowledge himself or his comportment in the world as posthuman. Fundamentally, he feels a sense of loss for the way his world was as he perceives it now to have been then. His perception is of course temporal, that is to say, he does not distinguish between his present and his past as differing states of humanism. There is only one experience of being Hiro Protagonist which is already posthuman, because it must necessarily be so through the epigenetic heritage of technology. Being a hacker defines Hiro's being in the world, his Dasein, but hackers are no longer independent or individual. They are part of the larger corporate machines and consequently, in

Heidegger's terminology, 'enframed.' However, the bringing forth that this enframing produces is not truth because the hacker is part of a larger ordering, of a definition that is subject to the corporations' goal of production. Hiro's lament is a recollection of a prior being in the world which was seemingly a true revealing, or poiēsis. Such bringing forth implies a memory of a *humanism which was already posthuman.*

Undeniably, Hiro is much like Case in that his comportment in the world is mediated by technology and certainly both men prefer the reality of their virtual worlds to physical reality. That said, Stephenson ignores the typical cyberpunk anxiety over the possibility of disembodied human consciousness found in *Neuromancer* and instead satirizes a world which has already accepted technology as constitutive of being human, especially in America. According to Stephenson's narrator, the American people live by a simple slogan, "No surprises" which is "the motto of the franchise ghetto, its *Good Housekeeping* seal, subliminally blazoned on every sign and logo that makes up the curves and grids of light that outline the [Los Angeles] Basin" (191). Americans, who "live in the world's most surprising and terrible country, take comfort in that motto" (191). Comfort means avoiding surprises, which in the world of the novel, can be found in the safety of what the evolution of technology has provided. The narrator describes such a world where:

> [Americans] have fled from the true America, the America of atomic bombs, scalpings, hip-hop, chaos theory, cement overshoes, snake handlers, spree killers, space walks, buffalo jumps, drive-bys, cruise missiles, Sherman's March, gridlock, motorcycle gangs, and bungee jumping. They have parallel-parked their bimbo boxes in identical computer-designed Burbclave street patterns and secreted themselves in symmetrical sheetrock shitholes with vinyl floors and ill-fitting woodwork and no sidewalks, vast house farms out in the loglo wilderness, a culture medium for a medium culture. (191)

The physical reality of the 'Burbclaves' is much the same as the virtual reality of life on the Metaverse 'Street.' Both environments are purposefully designed and programed to follow a specific structure and logic. Hiro prefers being in the Metaverse not because he would otherwise be trapped in a 'meat' body, but because "It beats the shit out of the U-Stor-It," (24) which is the "spacious 20-by-30" (19) storage unit he and his roommate call home in Inglewood, California. As David Porush observes, *Snow Crash* "is the strongest of the cyberpunk novels since Gibson's work itself that attempt to express what pedestrian life would be like in a cyberspatial domain and how that virtual disembodied life would interact with 'real life'" (561). The point here is that being in the world is not complicated by an opposition between disembodied experience and embodied experience as in *Neuromancer*. Instead, being human in this world is always already being posthuman. Being posthuman, however, cannot be acknowledged as such because there is no individual memory of being anything other. *Snow Crash* therefore, much like *Neuromancer*, reveals a sense of nostalgia for a humanism that can never be fully realized because such an experience can never be remembered. Moreover, this feeling of nostalgia for a past which never was perpetuates itself because the act of recollection produces an ideal which never was, and just as importantly, could never be.

The act of forgetting functions just as the Snow Crash virus does. As Hiro's colleague and fellow hacker Lagos, explains to him about the "deep structures" of the human brain, "Your nerves grow new connections as you use them – the axons split and push their way between the dividing glial cells – your bioware self-modifies – the software becomes part of the hardware" (Stephenson 126). The simple act of learning

makes him susceptible to the virus. Significantly, this happens without awareness of adaptation. Hiro does not know this is occurring. Consequently Hiro's being in the world implicates a forgetting because, just like the other characters of the novel, his comportment is constructed around his temporal self. During a quick call to his partner, Y.T., Hiro asks, "Where are you? In Reality or the Metaverse?" and she replies, "Both" (204). Both environments simultaneously create her experience of reality at that moment. The technology that allows her to have such an experience is not recognized as exterior to her reality. In other words, technology is inherent to her Dasein and not an experience which can be exteriorized as a process of unconcealing.

The joke of the Sprawl then, appears in a more subtle fashion in Stephenson's vision than Gibson's. We might even describe it as a dirty inside joke. Technology has always been inherent for Hiro and Y.T. to their comportment in the world. They experience none of the anxiety which Case feels between the physical, embodied reality of his 'meat prison' and the disembodied consciousness of life as a cyberspace cowboy. Their 'bioware,' as a technological apparatus itself, adapts and modifies their 'hardware,' signifying an evolution that is occurring epigenetically. This is further exemplified in the completely disembodied yet conscious figures of McCoy Pauley in *Neuromancer*, and the Librarian avatar in *Snow Crash*. Both figures understand themselves as programs yet the construct of Pauley experiences uneasiness about what he/it is. He tells Case, referring to himself as a construct, "This scam of yours, when it's over, you erase this goddam thing" (Gibson 106). The Librarian, on the other hand, as Stephenson's narrator notes, "Even though he's just a piece of software, he has reason to be cheerful; he can move through nearly infinite stacks of information in the Library with the agility of a spider dancing

across a vast web" (Stephenson 107). Disembodied consciousness is not an issue for the inhabitants of the Metaverse, whether they exist physically in reality or not. When Case asks the Librarian why the Sumerian language ceased to exist, the Librarian replies, "Since I am just a piece of code, I would be on very thin ice to speculate" (211). The humorous response is the trace of the dirty joke of the Sprawl. The simulation of the human is just not quite good enough either because it must still adhere to the metaphor of the Metaverse, *which is based on human experience, which is already the experience of the posthuman*. Hiro asks the Librarian, "Can you make a little more noise when you walk? I'm easily startled" (110). Hiro's request is made in a virtual environment carefully built around a metaphor, yet the metaphor has ceased to exist. Hiro's experience in virtual reality *is always already his reality*. To be startled is to react instantaneously, without a first thought. Hiro has forgotten that he is in a virtual reality, because to him and his being in the world, there is no distinction between realities, there is simply one Dasein. Thus we arrive at the question, where did the experience of being human go, at what point was it forgotten? Certainly this is cause for nostalgia and perhaps even lament. The answer, as the world of *Snow Crash* reveals, is that the experience of the human has always already been posthuman. The epigenetic heritage of technology reveals its presence as a memory that can only ever be recalled, or rather, navigated by and through technē.

The steersman, the cipher, the cyberspace cowboy, the cyberpunk, all of these imply in some mode or manner, the requirement of navigation, of assigning meaning amid an infinite amount of sensory data so as to provide an understanding of the world, and perhaps more importantly, to provide an understanding of what it means to be

human; which as it turns out, is already necessarily the experience of being posthuman.

CONCLUSION

Sherryl Vint writes jokingly in the afterword of her 2010 work, *Beyond Cyberpunk,* that she "cannot remember how [she] used to manage without information technologies: a few years ago [she] moved from an urban environment to a rural one in another province and found [herself] without an Internet connection and with no idea of how to find the nearest *anything"* (228). Though she offers a humorous connection to our present culture, her anecdote also contains the essence of the Sprawl joke. Her musing implies a deficiency although it is not identified as such. She has *forgotten* what life used to be like because of an increasing reliance on technology. She quotes Csiscery-Ronay, Jr., who claims "the present we inhabit is a form of exteriorized science fiction" and titles her afterword, "The World that Gibson Made," (229). Though she does not argue that our contemporary society is exactly like Case's in *Neuromancer*, she relates daily instances in which technology informs our being human (229). Science fiction has arrived and we have become cyborg. The technology of science fiction is present and highly visible. Cyberspace is a reality and it represents a powerful community, both socially and economically. Avatars exist in virtual game worlds not unlike Stephenson's Metaverse. In October 2010, Blizzard Entertainment announced that it had reached twelve million subscribers to its popular massively-multiplayer online game, *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard). In other words, by 2010, Blizzard's virtual reality contained twelve million avatars created by individual human beings as representations of themselves; who subsequently interacted daily with one another in an environment very much like the Metaverse. The experience of playing World of Warcraft constitutes being in the world

for the player regardless of a physical or a virtual reality. Playing the game creates an experience for the individual which then becomes part of the individual's Dasein.

In certain ways, the virtual realities of contemporary video games represent the heritage of cyberpunk. Recall the introduction and Booker's assertion that "Cyberpunk not only calls into question what it means to be human, but also suggests that the posthuman is an inevitable consequence of the dissolution of boundaries between human and machine" (110). It seems then that we have arrived at the posthuman. Again to quote Hayles, "the posthuman does not really mean the end of humanity, it signals instead the end of a certain conception of the human…" (286). Cyberpunk allows for an opening up of the shifting conceptions of the human, or as I am suggesting, other ways to navigate what it means to be human. As such, there undoubtedly continues to be a certain amount of dissolution between human and machine in contemporary society and with it some unresolved anxiety, particularly as portrayed in film.

The 1999 film, *The Matrix*, offers a dystopian world in which machines farm humans as a resource. In order to pacify these 'resources,' the machines physically plug humans into a virtual reality called simply The Matrix. Each human lives and dies in this virtual environment without ever realizing their world is merely a simulation. The environment of the film directly echoes Case's experience in *Neuromancer* with the artificial intelligence, Wintermute. Wintermute is able to construct within cyberspace, utilizing Case's memories, a representation of the people and places Case encountered in reality. The AI tells Case as they appear in a simulated Manhattan, "You can go for a walk, you wanna [sic]. It's all there. Or anyway all the parts of it you ever saw. This is memory, right? I tap you, sort it out, and feed it back in" (Gibson 170). Technology

creates a memory which is then constituted as part of Dasein. This is the revelation that the cyberpunk tradition simultaneously provides and laments. Being human has always already meant being posthuman. Moreover, there exists a sense of nostalgia for an 'ontologically hygienic' human experience that can never be accessed.

Scott Bukatman declares, "The body must become a cyborg to retain its presence in the world, resituated in technological space and refigured in technological terms. Whether this represents a continuation, a sacrifice, a transcendence, or a surrender of 'the subject' is not certain" (247). The focus here for Bukatman is the necessity of becoming, yet as I have argued, this becoming is always already occurring. Accordingly, I would suggest that this becoming actually indicates a continuation insofar as humanism *continues* to be defined through the posthuman. The lament inherent in *Neuromancer* and *Snow Crash*, and indeed the cyberpunk tradition itself, ultimately suggests that there can never be a return to a completely hygienic humanism. We have always been posthuman and as such our comportment in the world consists of both epigenetic and genetic memories. Crucially, our epigenetic inheritance by and through technology constitutes a forgetting such that only what is remembered survives. Who are we as human beings if we have necessarily forgotten what we were? Stiegler writes, "The ambiguity of the invention of the human, that which holds together the *who* and the *what*, binding them while keeping them apart, is différance undermining the authentic/inauthentic divide… Différance is neither the *who* nor the *what*, but their co-possibility, the movement of their mutual coming-to-be, of their coming into convention" (141). As I have discussed previously, posthumanism signifies the between of the who and the what. Case struggles to navigate between his embodied being, his 'meat prison' and his disembodied

consciousness as it exists in cyberspace. Hiro, however, does not encounter any of Case's anxiety. His experience in both the Metaverse and reality constitute his temporal being in world. His experience of being is already posthuman, though he cannot recognize it as such, because for him, this is already his temporal experience of being human.

Graham writes, "If cyberpunk does not exhibit clear-cut fears or hopes at its possible post/human futures, it may be because there is no longer any way of telling where the regions of the monsters begin and end…" (196). She then quotes David Porush, who says, "What aspect of humanity makes us human? Our flesh? Our thoughts? Our handiwork? Where's the line over which lies inhumanity? The technology is us, man" (196). The technology certainly is us, and it has always been us. The cyberpunk tradition suggests this revelation by reinforcing the human experience as one of temporality. Furthermore, cyberpunk exposes the fact that the division, the line, between humans and technology, has always been constructed *because we have always been posthuman*. Our comportment in the world has always already partly consisted of technology through language and tools. Cyberpunk forces the recognition that the experience of being human requires technology. The nostalgia of a previous experience of being human is always on the outside.

That is to say, it is a forgotten memory. Stiegler writes:

> What Heidegger calls the already there, constitutive of the temporality of Dasein, is this past that I have never lived but that is nevertheless my past, without which I never would have had any past of my own. Such a structure of inheritance and transmission…presupposes that the phenomenon of life *qua* Dasein becomes singular in the history of the living to the extent that, for Dasein, the epigenetic layer of life, far from being lost with the living when it dies, conserves and sediments itself, passes itself down in 'the order of survival' [*survivance*] and to posterity as a gift as well as a debt, that is, as a destiny (140).

For Stiegler, this non-living structure that is the particular individual *experience* of a human being itself, transmits itself epigenetically through technology rather than being lost with the death of an individual. Tools and language (itself a tool) convey the experience of the past as it was experienced in the present, according to the temporal being of the individual. As such, Dasein as a temporal experience of being in world for each generation always already consists of an epigenetic heritage informed by and through technology. The cyberpunk tradition, as I have argued, demonstrates the navigation, the deciphering, of the temporality of being human. Case and Hiro are genetic and epigenetic inheritors of past experience which always already informs their comportment in the world. Theirs is not a posthuman experience; rather it is a human experience that has always been posthuman. Posthumanism is humanism.

The dirty joke of the Sprawl is more than a joke. Instead it is a realization of a seemingly invisible trajectory of humanism within posthumanism. The notion of trajectory invites a question of origin, and this is surely one of the most important functions of science fiction, and as I would argue in particular, the cyberpunk tradition. Though I mentioned this previously and briefly, this trajectory need not be teleological. The cyberpunk tradition reveals a temporal experience of being in the world rather than an ultimate end result. The experience of each successive generation remains a human experience for those living in the present. The lament over the loss of a previous human experience is an articulation of nostalgia for that which never really was.

So where does that leave us now in a postcyberpunk world? Cyberspace and avatars are commonplace. Like Sherryl Vint, we struggle to envision our own being in

world without Internet, without status updates, twitter feeds, or e-mail. Crucially, all of these constitute Dasein, which is to say a human experience that is always already posthuman because of our technological epigenetic inheritance. The cyberpunk tradition teaches us a dirty joke about the indeterminacy of being human. Humanism has always already required a necessary supplement. Case's experience of being in the world, without his ability to jack into cyberspace, is less than whole, yet once Case's abilities are restored and he returns to cyberspace, the narrator explains, "This was what he was, who he was, his being" (Gibson 59). Similarly, once Hiro defeats the threat of the virus in a virtual public spectacle, "thousands of hackers pour in from all over the place…goggling into the Metaverse from all points in Reality as word of the extravaganza spreads down the fiber-optic grapevine at the speed of light" (Stephenson 456). The experience of being human in both novels consists of navigating both physical and virtual worlds as they are constitutive of Dasein. Cyberpunk then, exposes the indeterminacy of being human, and through such exposure, presents a certain nostalgia for a prior being in world which never was. However, this lament also opens the possibility for new ways of thinking the human through the play between the *who* and the *what*, as Stiegler suggests. Thus the function of the 'between' becomes différance and in the act of deferral comes the prospect of poiēsis. Given then the "epiphylogenesis of man," as it "bestows its identity upon the human individual: the accents of his speech, the style of his approach, the force of his gesture, the unity of his world," (Stiegler 140) there is always the potential for an unconcealing, a bringing forth, which has not yet been discovered. To reiterate David Porush's words, "The technology is us, man" (Graham 196). Welcome to the posthuman. We have always already been here.

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